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Eric R. D. MacLagan

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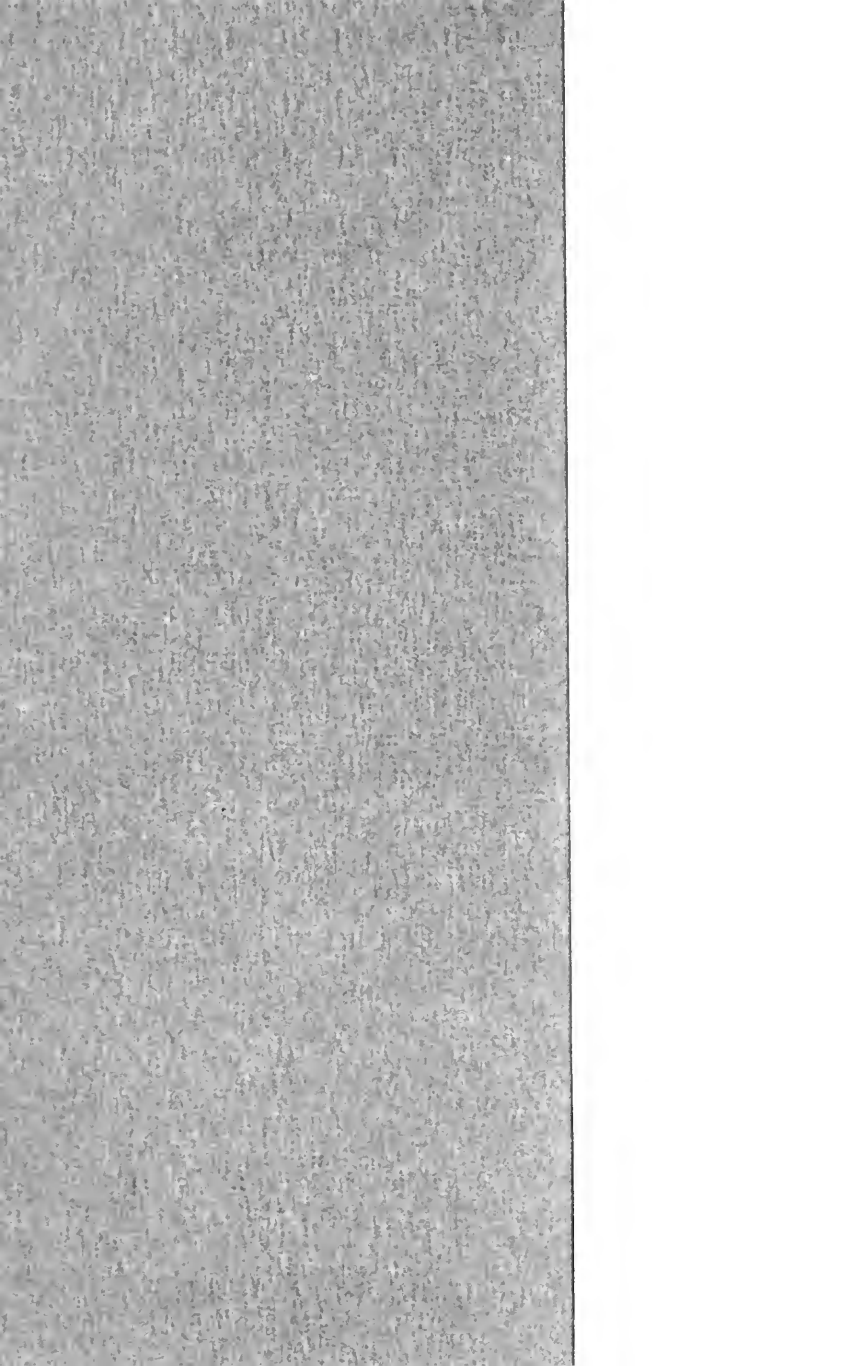


Howard Wilford Bell

London

1901

E.M.



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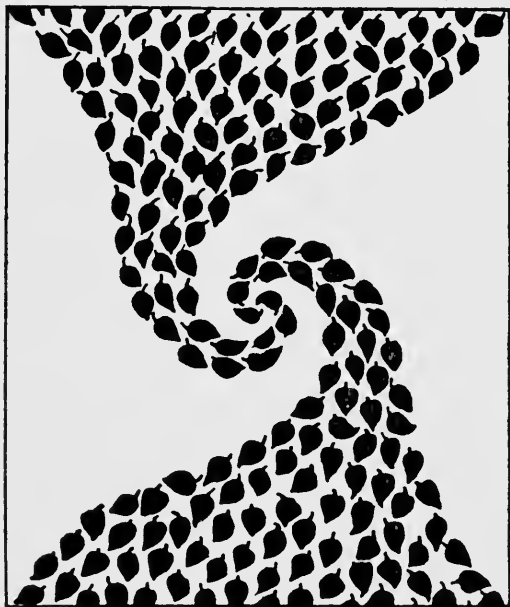
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LEAVES IN THE ROAD

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LEAVES ^{IN} THE ROAD

Eric.R.D.Maclagan



Howard Wilford Bell

London

1901

E.M.

TO
R. E. R.

OXFORD
1901.

ET JE M'EN VAIS
AU VENT MAUVAIS
QUI M'EMPORTE
DEÇÀ, DELÀ,
PAREIL À LA
FEUILLE MORTE.

VERLAINE

A COMPLAINT CONCERNING FIVE CHAINS

I have tasted the splendour of things forgotten,

I have dipped my lips in a wonderful wine,

Though the roses that scent it are sere and rotten

The passionate red of their hearts is mine ;

And you bid me turn from the Prince's Palace,

As the pale-eyed dawn through the curtain peers,

To the bitter draught of a meagre chalice,

A wine that is mixed with the water of tears.

I have pressed my fingers on bowls of amber

Where the vapours of cedar and sandal rise,

Where the hot lithe trails of the red rose clamber

From neck to brow and from brow to eyes ;

From the smooth floor scattered with scarlet petals,
You would have me kneel on a pavement bare,
Where the biting fume of your incense settles
In cold gray coils on the cloistered air.

I have clad me about in silken raiment
Inwrought with gold as a flame of fire,
That came from the East with a life for payment
By a merchant that journeyed in ships of Tyre :
And how should I cast it aside with loathing
And follow humbly with ankles bare,
And set on my body for delicate clothing
The girdle of cord and the cloth of hair ?

I have heard as I threaded the turning mazes
That pass and pass till the day begins,
The sweet shrill lips that have sung my praises,
The voice of the flutes and the violins :
Must I too stand at your sombre altar
And listen low in the chapels dim
To the heavy tide of your chaunted psalter,
The sobbing wail of your lenten hymn ?

I have seen in silent and sidelong glances,
Till soul and sense hung nigh on my lips,
White limbs that twined in the clinging dances
And bodies swayed to the finger tips,
Bright hair that burned as a taper burning,
Red lips that shone as a round rose shines ;
And must my eyes follow the slow priest turning,
The dark choir bowed in their kneeling lines ?

Ah, Christ ! Thou seest the bonds that bind me,
The five strong chains of my senses five,
That gather and coil and cling behind me,
That I may not sever, though sore I strive.
Faint blossom at even thy five Red Roses,—
And I loathe my bonds, and I love them well,—
And ever about me the darkness closes . . .
Deliver my soul from the Gates of Hell !

THREE TRIOLETS

I

None can cleave asunder
 This my love from me,
Men may gaze and wonder,
None can cleave asunder;
Nay, with all the thunder
 Of the severing sea,
None can cleave asunder
 This my love from me.

Stars must hide their faces
At the dawn of day ;
As in heavenly places
Stars must hide their faces,
So her memory chases
Other dreams away ;
Stars must hide their faces
At the dawn of day.

Dare ye match her glory,
Ye that loved of old ?
Stars of song and story,
Dare ye match her glory ;
Ladies of Malory,
Guenevere, Isold,
Dare ye match her glory,
Ye that loved of old ?

THE GHOSTLY HUNTERS

The dead man lay upon the bed
 With candles four and four,
But the soul crouched whimpering by his head
 And feared the open door.

Out of his hole the gray rat ran,
 Out of his hole the mouse,
Because the soul of the dead man
 Was tarrying in the house.

The soul fled out into the wind
 Before the midnight bell,
And ever flying heard behind
 The ghostly Hunters yell.

The Hunters drive with hounds of flame
The fleeting souls of men,
By the Heavenly gates and the door of Shame
To Middle earth again.

They ran beneath the dripping caves,
Beyond the drifting sky,
And above a roaring as of waves
Rose shrill the windy cry;

They swept across the misty plain
In ever nearing chase,
And the weary soul dropped down again
To seek a hiding place.

A little hour before the morn
The mother lay abed ;
The sun rose and the child was born
And the ghostly Hunters fled.

A CHANCE

As two pale shells, two twines
Of the sea's fruitless vines,
Are flung together in the surges' thunder,
To nestle, each by each,
Safe on the sheltering beach
Till the next wave shall tear them far asunder ;

Even so, Belovèd, we,
Caught in 'Time's restless sea,
And joined at hazard of the sharp wave's spurning,
One moment may abide
And then are dashed aside
To wait, and watch, and pray our wave's returning.

No wish of ours may stay
Or speed it on its way,
Stirred by the pulse of some far **ocean** weather ;
This pray we ; in that hour
May its resistless power
Spare us or slay, but spare or slay together.

MONT SAINT MICHEL. 1899

Here in the marvellous Isle am I

 Kneeling awhile by the barren choir,
And thou in the empty air on high
 Burnest all gold at the topmost spire ;
 Lord of the land and the splendid sea,
 Glorious Michael, fight for me.

Under the sweep of the sheer sea wall

 The white foam rushes to touch the land,
And over the rock the surges fall
 And seethe, and sever, and flood the sand ;
 Lord of the Isle and the roaring sea,
 Pitiful Michael, stand for me.

The moon slides out and the clouds pass by
And the golden armour to silver turns,
But ever above where the sea-mews fly
The Wonderful Guardian stands and burns ;
Lord of the sky and the shining sea,
Merciful Michael, pray for me.

THE FAR COUNTRY

Thou wast a lady sweet to see
 With tender eyes and wealth of hair,
Now thou art gone to the Far Country
 And never a one shall name thee fair.

Kings' sons were suitors unto thee,
 Thou shouldst have been a royal bride,
Now thou art gone to the Far Country
 And shapeless things are by thy side.

Great scorn hadst thou of such as we
 And little heed of how we sped,
Now thou art gone to the Far Country
 And beggars are above thy head.

THE IDOL

I dreamed I was an Idol, and I sat
Still as a crystal, smiling as a cat,
Where silent priests through immemorial hours
Wove for my head mysterious scarlet flowers.

Far down, the dusty daylight stabbed the air
And kindled into gold the painted hair
Of those imperious impotent images
That brooded in the perfumed silences.

There, as I waited, day by changeless day,
My people brought their gifts and knelt to pray,
And I alone, of all that dwelt apart,
Had pity on my people in my heart ;

Had pity on the sad that mourned their dead,
Had pity on the poor that cried for bread,
Had pity most on boy and girl that came
And prayed for love, and loving blest my name ;

But in my unavailing pity sat
Still as a crystal, smiling as a cat.

TO A BOY, WITH "THE
ADVENTURES OF ODYSSEUS"
(FOR R. B. M.)

I send you, for a little time,
Faint echoes of a lordlier rhyme,
Half told in words that cannot speak
The rolling glory of the Greek ;
But you shall hear yourself, ere long,
The minstrel's tale, the Siren's song,
And catch from Homer's ringing lips
The thunder of the meeting ships.
Then, when in some forgotten nook
You find, one day, this dusty book,
Think, for one moment thanking me,
" Here first I read the Odyssey."

SPONSA MORTIS

Make close the eastern windows
for the dying night
Without grows pale ; but here
upon their altars, light
Many a tawny taper
in pure sacrifice
To gaze upon my marriage
with compassionate eyes.
Lift from my weary body
all her pomp of gems,
The weight of necklaces
and awful anadems,
Ere the sad sapphires kindle
into alien blue ;

And clothe me in the clean
virginal white anew,
That thrills my aching limbs
with sudden cool embrace ;
But first, above the heavy
hair that crowns my face,
Bind fast a linen veil
to hold my ears unmoved
By all the clamour of
the waters I have loved.

So, being clad devoutly,
with unhurrying feet,
Across the threshold I
go forth at last to meet,
After his courtship of
innumerable days,
A more tremendous bridegroom
than your lips can praise.

THE HOST OF AIR

O vast implacable host of air,
Will you not give us a little rest
From the crying of passion and despair,
And treading of feet on an old stair,
And laughter, and beating of the breast ?

Your windy banners shall not be furled,
Nor your fires die under the hill,
Nor your shrill spears cease to be hurled
Until in the final flame the world
Is burnt into crystal, and is still.

ABSENCE

Here in the room, where all things keep
 Their lingering memories of you,
 I sit and hunger all day through
For night that brings me dreams and sleep.

The curtain, faint with tarnished gold,
 And blossoms in whose silk there clings
 A perfume of forgotten things,
Hangs idly swaying, fold by fold ;

The glimmering mirror seems to wait
 For you to cloud it with your breath
 In gazing ; and the rose beneath
For lack of you is desolate,

The rose that, sickening in the sun,
Droops wearily out of the tall
Venetian chalice, letting fall
Her scented petals, one by one.

THE INTRUDER

I thought to live in solitude apart,
A watcher in the sea-girt tower,
While in the untrodden roadways of my heart
I heard the grass grow, hour by hour.

I dwelt remote from laughter and from sighs,
These many days, until you came
With your insatiable indifferent eyes
Blue as the blue heart of a flame.

Now all the day there thunders in my ears
The tumult of the circling sea,
And, fed with frankincense of hopes and fears,
The flame consumes my heart and me.

HYMN TO APHRODITE

AFTER SAPPHO

Immortal Goddess of the Broidered Chair,

Wile-weaving Child of Zeus, my prayer receive ;

No more, dread Queen, with anguish and despair

My spirit grieve.

But hither speed and hearken, if afar

Thou e'er hast heard my pleading voice of old,

And left behind thee in thy yokèd car

The halls of gold,

Thy father's house ; the sparrows fleet and fair

That bore thee swiftly round the black world's girth

Smote with their multitudinous wings the air

'Twixt heaven and earth ;

Sudden they came ; but thou, my Lady blest,
With strange sweet smile upon thy deathless face,
Didst ask me why, with what new care oppress,
I sought thy grace ;

Didst bid me tell thee for what beauty new,
What new desire my passionate soul might long.
“ Whom shall I draw to love thee, Psappha ? who
Hath done thee wrong ?

For though she fly thee, she shall yet pursue,
Yea, though she shun thy gifts, she yet shall give,
Yea, though she love not, she shall love thee too,
Though sore she strive.”

Then come, I pray thee, come, to rid me now
From my sad care ; then, whatsoe'er my heart
Would see fulfilled, fulfil it ; and do thou
Take up my part.

TEARS

AFTER PALLADAS

Once among tears I was born, and now after
tears I am dead,

And all through the life I lived, many the tears
that I shed ;

Out on Man for a tearful feeble pitiful race
That is dragged underground at last, and
moulders away apace.

PRESENTS

AFTER VILLIERS DE L'ISLE ADAM

If you should ask, some even-time,
The secret of my soul's distress,
I'll speak to you an ancient rhyme
To touch your loneliness.

If you should tell of griefs you bore,
Of hopes that never smiled on you,
I'll go and pluck you nothing more
Than roses, brimmed with dew.

If, like the blossom of the dead
Apart amid the tombs it loves,
You long to share the tears I shed,
Then I will give you doves.

AFTER PAUL VERLAINE

(LA BONNE CHANSON, XX.)

In dolorous uncertainty

I wandered by the treacherous way ;
Thy hands, Belovèd, guided me.

So faint, so pale, so far away

The feeble hope of morning shone ;
You looked at me, and it was day.

Save for his echoing steps alone

No sound the traveller's heart might cheer ;
It was your voice said, " Follow on."

My heart, in darkness and in fear,

Wept on its way for lone distress ;
But Love, our delicate conqueror, dear,
Has made us one in happiness.

APPARITION

AFTER STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

The moon grew very sad ;
the weeping seraphim
Dreamed, with their bows in hand,
amid the calm of dim
Vaporous blossoms, and
from dying viols drew
Pale sobs, that floated o'er
the flowers crowned with blue.
It was that hallowed day
you first bestowed your kiss ;
My dreaming mind, desirous
to torment my bliss,
Drank, in her wisdom, deeply
of Grief's sweet perfume
That leaves, without regret
and without after-gloom,

Unto the heart that plucks
 a Vision's harvesting.
Eyes bent on age-worn pavement
 I was wandering,
When in the evening time,
 with sunlight in your hair,
You in my path appeared
 to me, stood smiling there . . .
I thought I saw the fairy
 with the Cap o' Light
Who once, in my spoilt childhood,
 through sweet dreams of night
Passed, ever 'twixt her fingers'
 loosely fastened bars,
Scattering snowy clusters
 of white perfumed stars.

LEAVES IN THE ROAD

Last year, when we were glad together,
We wondered, you and I,
At the leaves drifting in the road
And the clouds in the sky ;

Now, in the same gray autumn weather,
We are so far apart,
And the leaves drifting in the road
Put the grief in my heart.



Chiswick Press: Charles Whittingham and Co.
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